LGBT symbols

The LGBT community has adopted certain symbols for self-identification to demonstrate unity, pride, shared values, and allegiance to one another. **LGBT symbols** communicate ideas, concepts, and identity both within their communities and to mainstream culture. The two most-recognized international LGBT symbols are the pink triangle and the rainbow flag. The pink triangle, employed by the Nazis in World War II as a badge of shame, was re-appropriated but retained negative connotations. The rainbow flag, previously used as a symbol of unity among all people, was adopted to be a more organic and natural replacement without any negativity attached to it.

Contents

Flags
- Rainbow
- Bear culture
- Bisexuality
- Intersex
- Lesbianism
- Pansexuality
- Pink Jack
- Transgender

Other symbols
- Ace ring
- Blue feather
- Calamus plant
- Double-gender
- Freedom rings
- Green carnation
- Handkerchief code
- Lambda
- Purple hand
- Unicorns
- Violets

Triangle badges of the Third Reich

Gallery
- LGBT pride flags
- Other

See also

References

External links

Flags

Rainbow

Gilbert Baker designed the rainbow Pride flag for the 1978 San Francisco Gay Freedom Celebration. The flag does not depict an actual rainbow. Rather, the colors of the rainbow are displayed as horizontal stripes, with red at the top and violet at the bottom. It represents the diversity of gays and lesbians around the world. In the original eight-color version, pink stood for sexuality, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for the sun, green for nature, turquoise for art, indigo for harmony, and violet for spirit.[1] A copy of the original 20-by-30 foot, eight-color flag was remade by Baker in 2000, and was installed in the Castro district in San Francisco.[2] Another similar flag flies at The Center in New York City.

Original eight-stripe version designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978

Version with hot pink removed due to a lack of fabric. (1978–1979)

Six-color version popular since 1979

Bear culture

International Bear Brotherhood

Bear is an affectionate gay slang term for those in the bear communities, a subculture in the gay community and an emerging subset of the LGBT community with its own events, codes, and culture-specific identity. Bears tend to have hairy bodies and facial hair; some are heavy-set; some project an image of working-class masculinity in their grooming and appearance, though none of these are requirements or unique indicators. The bear concept can function as an identity, an affiliation, and an ideal to live up to. There is ongoing debate in bear communities about what constitutes a bear. Some state that self-identifying as a bear is the only requirement, while others argue that bears must have certain physical characteristics, such as a hairy chest and face, a large body, or a certain mode of dress and behavior.

Bears are almost always gay or bisexual men; transgender men (regardless of their sexuality) and those who shun labels for gender and sexuality are increasingly included within bear communities. The bear community has spread all over the world, with bear clubs in many countries. Bear clubs often serve as social and sexual networks for older, hairier, sometimes heavier gay and bisexual men, and members often contribute to their local gay communities through fundraising and other functions. Bear events are common in heavily gay communities.

The International Bear Brotherhood Flag was designed in 1995 by Craig Byrnes.[3]

Bisexuality

First unveiled on 5 December 1998,[4] the bisexual pride flag was designed by Michael Page to represent and increase visibility of bisexuals in the LGBT community and society as a whole. This rectangular flag consists of a broad magenta stripe at the top, a broad stripe in blue at the bottom, and a narrower deep lavender band occupying the central fifth.

Bisexual pride

Page describes the meaning of the pink, lavender, and blue (ratio 2:1:2) flag as this: "The pink color represents sexual attraction to the same sex only (gay and lesbian). The blue represents sexual attraction to the opposite sex only (straight) and the resultant overlap color purple represents sexual attraction to both sexes (bi)." He also describes the flag's meaning in deeper terms, stating "The key to understanding the symbolism of the Bisexual pride flag is to know that the purple pixels of color blend unnoticeably into both the pink and blue, just as in the 'real world,' where bi people blend unnoticeably into both the gay/lesbian and straight communities."[5]

The blue and pink overlapping triangle symbol represents bisexuality and bi pride. The origin of the symbol, sometimes facetiously referred to as the "biangles", is largely unknown, however the colours of bisexuality originate from this symbol: pink for attraction to women, blue for attraction to men, and lavender for attraction to both, as well as a reference to queerness.[5]

Intersex

Intersex pride

Intersex people are those who do not exhibit all the biological characteristics of male or female, or exhibit a combination of characteristics, at birth. Between 0.05% and 1.7% of the population is estimated to have intersex traits.[6][7]

The intersex pride flag was created by Intersex Human Rights Australia in July 2013 to create a flag "that is not derivative, but is yet firmly grounded in meaning". The organisation describes yellow and purple as "hermaphrodite" colors. The organisation describes the circle as "unbroken and unornamented, symbolising wholeness and completeness, and our potentialities. We are still fighting for bodily autonomy and genital integrity and this symbolises the right to be who and how we want to be".[8][9][10]

Lesbianism

Labrys lesbian feminist pride flag

Women considered asocial by the Third Reich because they did not conform to the Nazi ideal of a woman, which included homosexual females, were condemned to concentration camps and wore an inverted black triangle badge to identify them.[11][12] Some lesbians reclaimed this symbol as gay men reclaimed the pink triangle, and many lesbians also reclaimed the pink triangle although lesbians were not included in Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code.[11]

Lipstick lesbian flag without kiss

The labrys lesbian pride flag, created in 1999,[13] involves a labrys superimposed on the inverted black triangle, set against a violet hue background. The labrys was used as an ancient religious symbol[14] and for other various purposes.[15] It was adopted as a symbol of empowerment by the lesbian feminist community in the 1970s.[16][17][18]

The original lipstick lesbian flag with a red kiss superimposed on six shades of red and pink colors and a white bar in the center was introduced in a weblog in 2010.[19] It was later modified with the removal of the kiss, but the designer responsible for the bars-only version has not been identified. The lipstick flag represents "homosexual women who have a more feminine gender expression".[20]

A third lesbian pride flag design often seen at pride festivals and dyke marches is the rainbow flag with two interlocked Venus symbols.[21] None of the three designs are considered an "official" lesbian pride flag.

Pansexuality

The pansexual pride flag has been found on various Internet sites since mid-2010.[22] It has three horizontal bars that are pink, yellow and blue.[23] The pink band symbolizes women; the blue, men; and the yellow, those of a non-binary gender, such as agender, bigender or genderfluid.[22][24][5][25][26]

Pansexual pride

A "P" with the tail converted to an arrow with a cross is also sometimes used. It predates the flag and is still in use today. The cross on the "P"'s tail refers to the cross on the Venus or female symbol (♀), and the arrow refers to the arrow on the Mars or male symbol (♂).[27] While it does not technically have a name, it is sometimes colloquially referred to as "the pansexual symbol".

Pink Jack

Pink Jack

In the United Kingdom, since 2006, the Pink Jack, a pink version of the Union Jack, has been used to represent a British LGBT identity.[28][29]

Transgender

A transgender symbol is the Transgender Pride Flag designed by transgender woman Monica Helms in 1999,[30] which was first shown at a pride parade in Phoenix, Arizona, USA in 2000.[31] It was flown from a large public flagpole in San Francisco's Castro District beginning November 19, 2012 in commemoration of the Transgender Day of Remembrance.[31] The flag represents the transgender community and consists of five horizontal stripes: two light blue, two pink, with a white stripe in the center Helms described the meaning of the flag as follows:

Transgender pride

> "The stripes at the top and bottom are light blue, the traditional color for baby boys. The stripes next to them are pink, the traditional color for baby girls.[31] The white stripe is for people that are nonbinary, feel that they don't have a gender."[32][33] The pattern is such that no matter which way you fly it, it is always correct, signifying us finding correctness in our lives.[31]

Philadelphia became the first county government in the U.S. to raise the transgender pride flag in 2015. It was raised at City Hall in honor of Philadelphia's 14th Annual Trans Health Conference, and remained next to the US and City of Philadelphia flags for the entirety of the conference. Then-Mayor Michael Nutter gave a speech in honor of the trans community's acceptance in Philadelphia.[34]

A symbol of the female (♀), male (♂) and Genderqueer (⚧) symbols combined around a circle (⚧) is sometimes used to represent transgender people.[35][36]

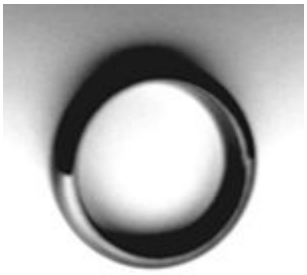
Also under the trans or transgender umbrella are all those who identify off the gender binary. There are many different identities within this category includinggenderqueer, two-spirit, gender fluid, third gender, and androgyny.[37]

Other symbols

In addition to major symbols of the LGBT community, symbols have been used to represent members' unity, pride, shared values, and allegiance to one another

Ace ring

Wearing a black ring (also known as an ace ring) on the middle finger of one's right hand is a way asexual people signify their sexuality. The ring is deliberately worn in a similar manner as one would a wedding ring to symbolize asexuality. The symbol began in 2005.[38][39]



Ace ring

Blue feather

In the Society for Creative Anachronism, LGBT members often wear a blue feather to indicate an affiliation with Clan Blue Feather, a group of SCA members promoting the study of LGBT culture and people in the Middle Ages.[40] Because of this affiliation, blue feathers have also been used at some Renaissance Faires and Pagan events.

Calamus plant

According to some interpretations, American poet Walt Whitman used the calamus plant to represent homoerotic love.[41]

Acorus Calamus

Double-gender

Lesbian and gay gender sex symbols

Interlocked gender symbols. Each gender symbol derives from the astronomical symbol for the planet Venus and Mars. In modern science, the singular symbol for Venus is used to represent the female sex, and singular symbol for Mars is used to represent the male sex.[42] Two interlocking female symbols (⚢) represent a lesbian or the lesbian community, and two interlocking male symbols (⚣) a gay male or the gay male community.[43][44]

The symbols first appeared in the 1970s.[44]

Freedom rings

Freedom rings, designed by David Spada, are six aluminum rings, each in one of the colors of the rainbow flag. They were released in 1991.[45] Symbolizing happiness and diversity, these rings are worn by themselves or as part of necklaces, bracelets, and key chains.[45]

They are sometimes referred to as "Fruit Loops".[46]

Green carnation

In 19th-century England, green indicated homosexual affiliations. Victorian gay men would often pin a green carnation on their lapel as popularized by openly gay author Oscar Wilde, who often wore one on his lapel.[47][48]

Green carnation

Handkerchief code

In the early 20th century gay men in New York City's Caucasian professional world would often wear red neckties to signal their identity. This practice was later expanded into a system called flagging, or the hanky code.[49]

Lambda

Lambda – Greek alphabet letter

In 1970, graphic designer Tom Doerr selected the lower-case Greek letter lambda to be the symbol of the New York chapter of the Gay Activists Alliance.[50][51] The alliance's literature states that Doerr chose the symbol specifically for its denotative meaning in the context of chemistry and physics: "a complete exchange of energy–that moment or span of time witness to absolute activity".[50] Within the STEM field, the lambda symbol is associated with the half-life parameter of exponential random variables, which describes the time it takes for a state to change.

The lambda became associated with Gay Liberation,[52][53] and in December 1974, it was officially declared the international symbol for gay and lesbian rights by the International Gay Rights Congress in Edinburgh, Scotland.[54] The gay rights organization Lambda Legal and the American Lambda Literary Foundation derive their names from this symbol.

Purple hand

On October 31, 1969, sixty members of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) staged a protest outside the offices of the *San Francisco Examiner* in response to a series of news articles disparaging LGBT people in San Francisco's gay bars and clubs.[55][56] The peaceful protest against the "homophobic editorial policies" of the *Examiner* turned tumultuous and were later called "Friday of the Purple Hand" and "Bloody Friday of the Purple Hand".[56][57][58][59][60] Examiner employees "dumped a bag of printers' ink from the third story window of the newspaper building onto the crowd".[56][58] Some reports state that it was a barrel of ink poured from the roof of the building.[61] The protesters "used the ink to scrawl 'Gay Power' and other slogans on the building walls" and stamp purple hand prints "throughout downtown San Francisco" resulting in "one of the most visible demonstrations of gay power".[56][58][60] According to Larry LittleJohn, then president of SIR, "At that point, the tactical squad arrived – not to get the employees who dumped the ink, but to arrest the demonstrators. Somebody could have been hurt if that ink had gotten into their eyes, but the police were knocking people to the ground."[56] The accounts of police brutality include women being thrown to the ground and protesters' teeth being knocked out.[56][62]

Inspired by Black Hand extortion methods of Camorra gangsters and the Mafia,[63] some gay and lesbian activists attempted to institute "purple hand" as a warning to stop anti-gay attacks, but with little success. In Turkey, the LGBT rights organization MorEl Eskişehir LGBTT Oluşumu (Purple Hand Eskişehir LGBT Formation), also bears the name of this symbol.[64]

Unicorns

Unicorn in Portland Pride, 2017

Unicorns have been part of pride flags and symbols of LGBT culture in the last century, becoming prominent during the gay rights protests of the 1970s and 1980s.[65]

Violets

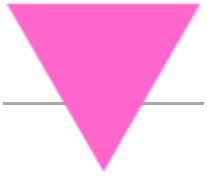
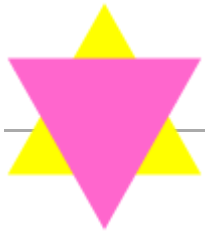
Violets and their color became a special code used by lesbians and bisexual women.[66][67][68] The symbolism of the flower derives from several fragments of poems by Sappho in which she describes a lover wearing garlands or a crown with violets.[69][70] In 1926, the play *La Prisonnière* by Édouard Bourdet used a bouquet of violets to signify lesbian love.[71] When the play became subject to censorship, many Parisian lesbians wore violets to demonstrate solidarity with its lesbian subject matter.[72]

Viola flower

Triangle badges of the Third Reich

One of the oldest of these symbols is the inverted pink triangle that male homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps were required to wear on their clothing. The badge is one of several badges that internees wore to identify what kind of prisoners they were.[73] Many of the estimated 5–15,000 gay men and lesbians imprisoned in concentration camps died during the Holocaust.[74] The pink triangle was later reclaimed by gay men, as well as some lesbians, in various political movements as a symbol of personal pride and remembrance.[75][11] AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) adopted the inverted pink triangle to symbolize the "active fight back" against HIV/AIDS "rather than a passive resignation to fate."[76]

The pink triangle was used exclusively with male prisoners, as lesbians were not included under Paragraph 175, a statute which made homosexual acts between males a crime. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) stipulates that this was because women were seen as subordinate to men, and the Nazi state did not feel that homosexual women presented the same threat to masculinity as homosexual men. According to USHMM, many women were arrested and imprisoned for "asocial" behaviour, a classification applied to those who did not conform to the Nazi ideal of a woman's role: cooking, cleaning, kitchen work, child raising, and passivity. Asocial women were tagged with an inverted black triangle.[12] Many lesbians reclaimed this symbol for themselves as gay men reclaimed the pink triangle.[11]

Pink Triangle	Black Triangle	Pink & Yellow Triangles
		
The inverted pink triangle used to identify homosexual men in the concentration camps.	The inverted black triangle used to mark individuals considered "asocial". The category included homosexual women, nonconformists, prostitutes, nomads, Romani, and others.	The inverted pink triangle overlapping a yellow triangle was used to single out male homosexual prisoners that were Jewish.

Gallery

LGBT pride flags

Gay

Agender

Aromantic

Asexual

Bear Brotherhood

Bigender

Bisexual

Demisexual

Feather pride

Gay pride flag of South Africa

Genderfluid

Genderqueer

Intersex

Israeli transgender and genderqueer

Leather Pride flag

Lesbian pride

Lesbian feminist

Lipstick lesbian

Lipstick lesbian (without lipstick kiss)

Non-binary

Pansexual

Pink Jack

Polysexual

Transgender

Twink

Other

Biangles (represents Bisexuality)

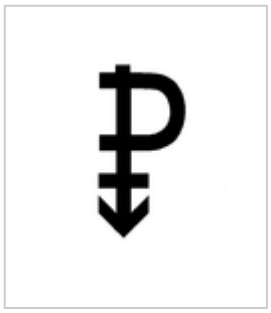
Double moon (represents Bisexuality)

Double female symbol (represents Lesbian females)

Double male symbol (represents Gay males)

Labrys (represents Lesbian feminism)

Lambda (represents Gay Liberation)



Pansexual symbol

Transgender symbol

See also

- LGBT slogans
- White Knot

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External links

- Origin & History of Gay & Lesbian Symbols shows images of some of these symbols and offers a brief historical account of each.

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